

Philadelphia

Part 1

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[00:00:00] To any young children and to everyone, I would say, yes, we're almost there. One more meeting to go.

And I would also say what I think we all know and feel, and that is that the Lord is almost here.

We stand on the very threshold of the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and as we know, the first part of that second coming is his coming for his own. [00:01:02] And I'm quite sure that every one of us here, when he does come for us, would desire to be found pleasing to him. And so in that connection, and also having been occupied with the second and third epistles of John in our Bible readings, I would like to turn you to two passages in the book of Revelation. And the first one is in chapter one, the vision of the Lord Jesus that John had, and I'm going to read the verses there that give us that description, but it's not my intention to comment directly on those verses. [00:02:02] I want to speak rather on the second passage in Revelation, which we will come to. And so in the book of Revelation, chapter one, and I'm going to read from verse nine.

I was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the spirit on the Lord's day and heard behind me a great voice as of a trumpet saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. [00:03:04] And what thou seest, write in a book and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia, unto Ephesus and unto Smyrna and unto Pergamos and unto Thyatira and unto Sardis and unto Philadelphia and unto Laodicea. And I turned to see the voice that spake with me, and being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks. And in the midst of the seven candlesticks, one likened to the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were as a flame of fire. [00:04:05] And his feet likened to fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace, and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars, and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not, I am the first and the last. I am he that liveth and was dead. Behold, I am alive for evermore. Amen. And have the keys of hell and of death. [00:05:01] Write these things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter. The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven

churches. And now in chapter 3, verse 7.

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth. [00:06:14] I know thy works. Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it. For thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie. Behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. [00:07:02] Behold, I come quickly. Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out. And I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God. And I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. I want to occupy you with this beautiful assembly at Philadelphia.

[00:08:04] It is an assembly in which we find the very thing to which the elect lady was exhorted, and the very thing that the beloved Gaius was encouraged to continue in.

We know that it is the only one of the seven assemblies, apart from Smyrna, against which our Lord had no charge to bring.

The Lord Jesus could look upon this company of believers, and everything that he saw was pleasing to him. Everything that he saw delighted his heart.

[00:09:12] We are, most of us anyway, either after this meeting this evening or tomorrow, returning to our homes, and on Lord's Day morning we will, I trust, be found in the local assemblies from which we come. And I think we can benefit greatly, can we not, by seeing what it was about this assembly that was so pleasing to the Lord, in order that, as far as in us lies with the Lord's help by the Spirit, we might contribute such features to the local assembly where we are found.

[00:10:20] That the local assembly that we attend might present the same attractive features to the Lord Jesus as did the assembly here at Philadelphia.

I don't think it was an accident that this assembly was located at Philadelphia.

However that may be, there is a most happy correspondence between the name of that place and what the Lord found there. [00:11:13] There was brotherly love. That is for sure. The brethren were getting on happily together.

They were occupied with the Lord Jesus, and as occupied with him divine love flowed down from him into their hearts, and it flowed out from them to each one in the way of brotherly love.

And we were reminded in the course of one of the readings today, I think from Hebrews 13 verse 1, that one of the characteristics of brotherly love, one of the ways in which we express brotherly love is through the grace of showing hospitality. [00:12:28] We show it to those who belong to the same divine family that we belong to. We show it to the children of God, and we are especially pleased to be able to show it to those who are serving the Lord. We've been occupied too with the importance of loving

in truth. [00:13:02] And one of the interesting things is that if you look at the other four references in the New Testament to brotherly love, in Romans 12, 1 Thessalonians 4, 1 Peter 1, and in 2 Peter chapter 1, you will find that in each and every case, either in the same verse that you get the reference to brotherly love, or in the verse before, or in the verse after, there is a reference to love, to divine love. And divine love has this characteristic, as we have been hearing over and over and over again in the course of our conference together, that it is always consistent with truth. And so the brotherly love that we show to one another, the brotherly love that we show to the children of God, is brotherly love that is always guarded, in the sense that it is governed by divine love. [00:14:23] For example, in 2 Peter chapter 1, there are things that we are exhorted to have in our faith, seven things, the sixth thing is brotherly love, and then Peter says, and to brotherly love, add love. This is a most important point.

And then we come on to the address itself.

It was addressed to the angel of the assembly, which was at Philadelphia.

[00:15:12] And the angel is a symbol. The book of Revelation is full of symbols. And here we have another symbol. The word angel means literally messenger. And the angel to which the letter was addressed is a symbol of those who were the messengers of the Lord to the assembly. They were the regular channel of communication between the Lord and the saints in that place. And the letter was addressed to them, as were the other six letters addressed to the angels of the assemblies in the various places. [00:16:12] Because these channels of communication between the Lord and the assembly had a very particular responsibility. And they were accountable for the state of the assembly that the Lord found.

And here, most happily, when they received this letter from the Lord, I'm sure as they read it, their hearts would have been filled with joy. But we are all responsible. Every one of us is responsible in connection with the assembly that we attend and its state.

[00:17:14] And the way in which the Lord Jesus presents himself to this particular assembly is of note. He speaks of himself in a moral way.

And he does that because he wants the holiness and truth that characterize him to be mirrored in those who form a part of the assembly at Philadelphia.

[00:18:01] These things saith he that is holy. He that is doesn't say truth, it says true. And I want to think about these two things with you for a little while. These things saith he that is holy.

The Lord Jesus is intrinsically and intensively holy. And we cannot have any fellowship with him unless we are holy.

We read elsewhere that without holiness no one shall see the Lord. That's impossible. And in 1 Peter chapter 1, for example, we are exhorted to holiness.

[00:19:06] Be ye holy for I am holy.

And this is a quotation from the book of Leviticus. I think it's Leviticus chapter 21, if my memory serves me correctly. You need to check that reference. But when you look at that chapter, the entire

chapter is occupied with what was and what was not suitable food for the children of Israel.

There was what they could eat and there was what they were not to eat.

[00:20:04] And it's just the same so far as we today are concerned. God isn't concerned with what goes into our stomachs. But he is concerned with what goes into our minds and what goes into our hearts. And I want to challenge you, especially you young people, as to what it is that you feed on. With what do you occupy yourself?

The Lord Jesus says, he that eats me shall live on account of me.

[00:21:06] And what that means is, if we feed upon the Lord Jesus Christ, he will practically be the reason for our being.

The reason for our existence. Reason d'etre. Is that what you say in French? Reason d'etre. Yeah. I came back from Germany never having been to a German conference before. And I came back able to say good morning and good day and I feel now I'm fluent in German. And evidently I'm getting there in terms of being completely fluent in French. Which is terrific.

[00:22:01] And so that's what the Lord Jesus wants to be to us, to every one of us. He wants to be the reason why we live. And if we do appropriate him, if we do feed on him, both as the true manner, as we do feed upon him as the one who is now in glory and who answers to the old corn of the land, then what the Lord Jesus says there will be true of us and we shall be pleasing to him. Some remarks were made in the course of the Findocty conference about computers and the dangers connected with the internet.

[00:23:05] And our brother Graham Warnes made a beautiful remark which I want to repeat now. He said, as for me and my mouse, we will serve the Lord. And that's beautiful, isn't it? And that's the way we want to approach our use of the computer and our use of media in general. These things can be very useful tools but we have to be careful that they don't become a source of food where we're feeding on things that the Lord doesn't want us to feed upon. So the first thing is that he wants us to be holy as he is holy. [00:24:08] The second thing is he says that he is the true. And I want to ask you and I ask the Lord to show me whether there's anything in my heart or in my life that is false.

Anything that is inconsistent with having fellowship with him who is the true. Is there anything that is really inconsistent with what we know the Christian life should be? And if there is, I think we need to put those things away. [00:25:04] We need to have done with them. We need to be finished with them. And there may be things to which we have become addicted.

There may be habits and ways in which we occupy our time. And we know, we know they are a hindrance as far as our spiritual progress is concerned. And the Lord wants us to lay those things aside and if we lay those things aside he will fill our hearts. He'll fill our hearts with himself. He'll fill our hearts with his love. And we'll regret the fact that we ever gave time. Oh dear, dear. We'll regret the fact that we swung our arms about. [00:26:07] We'll regret the fact that we ever gave time to those time-wasting things. And the Lord will help us to use our time in a way that is spiritually profitable and honouring to him.

He that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and no one shutteth and

shutteth and no one openeth. This is an interesting reference. This is again a quotation from the Old Testament from the book of Isaiah this time, chapter 22, verse 22. And it speaks about one who had a certain place of responsibility in the house of Israel.

[00:27:16] And there was another who had occupied that office before him and had been unfaithful in it. But now there was one brought forward who is a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ who was going to take up those things and hold them faithfully for God. And it says there that to him there would be given the key of David. He would have the key of David which is the authority and power of divine government. [00:28:04] And here we find the Lord Jesus reminding the assembly at Philadelphia that he has this power.

He has all power in heaven and upon earth but as having the key of David he is able to exercise that power now in the behalf of those who want to be faithful to him. In the behalf of those who want to do his will. He will make a way for them to make that possible.

And that's enormously encouraging for us today. [00:29:01] Whatever the opposition may be, even though those powers of spiritual wickedness in the heavenly places oppose.

Even though Satan himself sets himself against this assembly, the Lord assures them that he has the power to open doors for them and to close doors against the enemies. And in verse 8 he goes on to show that he has exercised this power in the behalf of the assembly at Philadelphia.

He says and all he says about their works is that he knows them. [00:30:04] The Lord Jesus has a good deal to say, a good deal more to say about the works of some of the other assemblies here in Revelation chapter 2 and 3. But it would appear from the brief statement at the beginning of verse 8 that their works were not necessarily as great as the works of some of the other Christian companies. But nevertheless the Lord knew them. He doesn't criticise them for the fact that their works weren't greater. He comforts them simply by telling them that he knows what they are. And then he goes on to say, Behold, I have set before thee, and the King James translation says, I have set before thee an open door. [00:31:11] The JND translation says, I have set before thee an opened door. It was a door that had been closed and that the Lord had now opened and the opening of this door signified that there was liberty.

There was complete liberty for this company of believers to do all the will of God. There was liberty to gather in simplicity to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ alone, outside and apart from the systems and organisations of men.

[00:32:14] But simply to come together in faith in answer to the promise of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 18.20 where two or three are gathered together and to my name there am I in the midst of them. There was liberty for that. Liberty for ministry.

Ministry that is led by the Holy Spirit, ministry that is consistent with the teaching of the Word of God.

[00:33:04] Liberty to answer to all the directions that are given us in an epistle like 1 Corinthians where we have church order brought before us. And how a local assembly should function and the character of the meetings that it should seek to maintain. There is liberty now the Lord has said, the Lord is indicating there is liberty for all this, there is liberty for service. Liberty for service in the gospel to go out with the glad tidings. Paul says somewhere there is a great door and it is actually open unto me.

[00:34:02] And there's a reason why, there's a reason why the Lord opened this door. And the Lord goes on to say why, he says because and notice what the because includes.

For in the Derby translation it's because for thou hast a little strength or a little power and has kept my word and hast not denied my name.

And it's a scriptural principle, a most important one that blessing follows obedience.

You cannot put these things the other way round, blessing follows obedience. [00:35:04] And this Christian assembly those that met in that place showed themselves obedient, obedient in connection with his word and obedient in relation to not denying his name. They had a little power, they were not occupied with those sign gifts that had marked the introduction of the Christian era.

The time for those sign gifts had passed away and they were content with the little power that marked them.

[00:36:05] Because as I think we've heard in the course of the conference another most important divine principle, it's only when we are weak that we are strong.

It's only when we realise that only by looking to the Lord and by dependence upon him will we be given the strength, the power to do his will that leads us in this path of obedience.

And the first thing that characterised them was that they had kept his word. [00:37:05] And this expression, his word, carries in it the thought of the core revelation that Christ has brought to us.

The revelation of the Father in the Son, this was something that the Lord Jesus brought to the disciples in his prayer in John's Gospel chapter 17. In John's Gospel chapter 17 the Lord prays to the Father and he refers to the disciples, to the eleven as those that had kept his word, they had continued with him in connection with this revelation of God that he had brought to them. [00:38:08] And I suppose we can extend that out and speak about the truth of Christianity, all the truths that are connected with that revelation of God that has been brought to us. And the work of the Lord Jesus upon the cross and the consequences for us of that work for us, those that have believed on him. All this is contained within what the Lord refers to here as my word and these Philadelphian believers had kept that word.

[00:39:02] They had gone on as believers being guided and governed by these divine truths and has not denied my name.

Here we have the connection that I referred to at the beginning with the second epistle of John. I wondered why the Lord puts it in the negative case. Thou hast not denied my name. And it seems to me that the answer probably is that there were lots of others who had denied his name.

And he says but thou, thou hast not denied my name.

[00:40:08] They clung to all that had been revealed to them concerning the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. And every one of us should take away from this conference the essential nature of this doctrine of Christ.

I don't think so much has been said about it. I don't think any of us could possibly, I hope not, have missed the point. But we need to hold fast these things and to cleave to the Lord Jesus as the one who is both God and man and the eternal son of the Father. [00:41:01] And then the Lord Jesus goes on in verse 9 to speak of those who are described as being of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews and are not but do lie. Behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet and to know that I have loved thee. This assembly was the product of a reviving by the Spirit of God.

What it describes I have absolutely no doubt in affirming is that work of the Spirit of God in the first half of the 19th century. I don't think there is any doubt as to that.

[00:42:03] And on the one hand there was recovery to the truth, but on the other there was the working of the enemy in order to bring forward a counterfeit.

That's always his way.

And what is called here a synagogue of Satan I take it was really a church. It's called a synagogue of Satan because it was based entirely on things connected with Judaism.

And these people who took the place of being Christians, they claimed that they were Jews. They claimed that they were the people of God. [00:43:02] But the Lord Jesus says that they're not but do lie.

And he goes on to say that he will make them to come and to worship at their feet and to know that he has loved them. And this is wonderful I think because it isn't them, it isn't the Philadelphians that they are worshipping.

It's the Lord Jesus whom they are worshipping. They are at the feet of the Lord Jesus and worshipping him.

But these Philadelphians are so near to Christ who is in their midst that they are also at the feet of these Philadelphian believers.

[00:44:15] It is the answer I think to faithfulness in connection with that scripture that we've already had before us in Matthew 18. A desire to be gathered unto his name by faith in this day and in that day.

The Lord's answer will be that he will be in the immediate midst of these faithful Philadelphian believers.

And they would know that he loved them. [00:45:03] Because thou hast kept the word of my patience I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the earth to try them that dwell upon the earth. This hour of temptation is the hour that is going to come upon the earth in that seven year period that will follow upon our translation to heaven. There are those who whatever their Christian profession may be received not the love of the truth.

And it's this group in particular I think this was before us too in the course of the conference on Wednesday. [00:46:04] This group, this class of people are going to be tried.

They are those people that are characterized by being earth dwellers.

And they are going to be tried and their trial will be that God will send them a certain working of error that they should believe a lie. And they will believe the lie and they will suffer the consequences of following those who are the agents of the devil on earth at that time. But they will be kept from that hour of trial.

[00:47:05] And we know that every true Christian will be taken by the Lord Jesus to heaven when he comes for us. He says in verse 11 I come quickly.

Isn't that music in to our hearts? Doesn't that make our hearts leap? Doesn't that make our hearts leap with joy? I come quickly. We know who's coming. And he says I come quickly. Hold that fast which thou hast that no man take thy crown. Don't let these things go. Don't lose your crown. I'm almost there.

[00:48:02] Just a little while. Just a very little while. Don't move away from this ground now just before I come. Hold fast.

And to every young person here I would say hold fast. Don't move away from the ground of gathering, the precious ground of gathering on which you and I by infinite grace are privileged to meet. And then the Lord speaks about the overcomer. He speaks about the future.

In that over cometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God. In connection with Solomon's temple there were two pillars. They were called Jachin and Boaz. That's right.

[00:49:06] And the one means he will establish. Do you know what Boaz means? No offers? In him is strength. He will establish. In him is strength. That was the confidence of the Philadelphian believers here on earth. That was their confidence in faith. And the Lord says you that overcome I'll make to be a pillar. Not outside the temple which is where the pillars Jachin and Boaz were. They were at the entrance to the temple. The overcomer will be a pillar in the temple. In the immediate presence of God to go no more out. Forever.

And I will write upon him the name of my God. [00:50:03] The name of the city of my God which is New Jerusalem. Which cometh down out of heaven from my God and I will write upon him. My new name. Everything's connected with the Lord Jesus. My time has gone so there's not scope to speak in more detail.

Which is I was asking a brother at the end of the readings about the reference here to my new name. I'm a bit fuzzy about that. So if any older brother can help me in connection with my new name I would be most grateful. It would seem to be a name that the Lord takes in connection with the sphere of glory. That then he will fill. And that new name will be written on the Philadelphian overcomer.

[00:51:05] But how come there is a call in Philadelphia to be an overcomer?

What is there in Philadelphia that has to be overcome? Only this.

The danger that we don't go on. That we don't continue. That's the danger we have to overcome. If others depart we must go on.

Go on.

May the Lord help us to do so.